

Sunday School

PAUL A PRISONER—THE ARREST.

Acts 21:17-39. Lesson for October 3, 1909.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."—2 Timothy 2:3.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Acts 21:17-26. Th.—Acts 22:17-29.
T.—Acts 21:27-40. F.—Luke 23:8-23.
W.—Acts 22:1-16. S.—Acts 16:35-40.
S.—Rev. 2:1-11.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 75. What is forbidden in the eighth commandment?

A. The eighth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever doth, or may, unjustly hinder our own, or our neighbor's wealth or outward estate.

TOPICAL OUTLINE.

Paul assailed by the Jews. Vs. 27-31.

Paul protected by the Roman Authorities. Vs. 32-36.

Paul's defense. Vs. 37-39.

LESSON COMMENTS.

Introductory. Having completed his third missionary tour, Paul arrived at the holy city. He had organized churches; wrought miracles, written epistles, confirmed believers and preached the gospel in Asia and Europe. Mnason of Cyprus entertained him in Jerusalem. The next day after his arrival, he made a report of his work to the elders, and when they heard it, they glorified God and advised him to follow a policy of conciliation toward the Jewish Christians who were still zealous for the law. As for the Gentile believers, the deliverances of the synod previously held in Jerusalem were obligatory upon them. They were not required to observe the Mosaic ritual, but to "keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication." Paul, therefore, took their advice to harmonize the Jewish and Gentile elements in the church and assumed the vow of a Nazarite with four others in the company. He submitted to the usual rites of purification with them and assisted them in meeting the expenses of the offering. Doubtless the motive of the elders in giving this advice was "to vindicate his doubtful claim to be esteemed a Jew, by publicly conforming to the rites and ceremonies of the law." Numbers 6:13-21. Paul respected the law as a rule of life, but not as a basis of justification before God.

Comment. Having fulfilled the conditions of the vow, at the close of seven days, he went into the temple through the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:2), but the precautions he took did not prevent the Jews from creating trouble. His presence angered the Jews from Asia Minor, who were present in the court of the temple. They knew him at Ephesus where he had lived and labored for three years. They regarded him as their enemy and they stirred up the people against him, apprehended him and falsely accused him. (Acts 24:18). He did not desire to create any disturbance, but these zealots called upon the Jews to expel Paul from those sacred precincts; alleging that he was a dangerous man for the people to hear and that he was an enemy to their law and temple. (Acts 24:5, 6). Furthermore, they accused him of polluting the holy place by bringing Greeks or Gentiles into it. They said that they had seen Trophimus, from Ephesus, there and he was with the apostle in the city. A slab has recently been excavated with the following inscription: "No man of alien race is to enter within the balustrade and fence that goes round the temple. If any one is taken in the act, let him know that he has himself to blame for the penalty of death that follows. Peloubet. The people of the city became excited; and, with mob violence, dragged Paul out of the court of the temple and closed the gates. And as they tried to take his life, information was sent to Lysias, the chief captain, in the tower of Antonia near by, that there was a disturbance in Jerusalem.

The Roman authorities at once went to the place and quelled the riot and rescued Paul. The Jews ceased to beat

him when they saw the soldiers. Lysias, however, ordered him to be bound with chains and demanded of him who he was and what he had done. But the tumult continued as the indiscriminate rabble thirsted for his blood. Lysias had him carried into the castle for examination and safety. As he was brought to the stairs that led up from the court of the temple to the castle he was lifted up by the pressure of the crowd. "This little circumstance is mentioned, not to show how carefully the Roman soldiers guarded and protected Paul, but simply as a vivid reminiscence of the scene by Luke, who well remembered seeing his beloved teacher, as the soldiers led him up the stairs, completely lifted from his feet by the resistless pressure of the crowd behind, so that without intending it, the soldiers carried him instead of leading him." Alexander. The multitude followed him with their yells, crying "Away with him"; as the same charming writer records the chief priests and the rulers and people, who demanded the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. (Luke 23:18).

As Paul was hurried to the castle or Antonia, he asked permission to speak to the chief captain, who commanded a thousand men. Lysias was surprised that this Hebrew could speak the Greek language; and inquired if he were the Egyptian who formerly made trouble and led four hundred murderers into the wilderness. Paul replied that he was a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, in Asia Minor; and that he was a citizen of an excellent city. The great apostle to the Gentiles, therefore, earnestly asked Lysias to permit him to address the people and defend himself. Permission being granted, he spoke from the stairs to the crowd in the Hebrew language. We have a record of this marvelous address in the twenty-second chapter.

Doctrinal and Practical. 1. True religion imparts divine tranquility in trouble. A sweet composure abides in the soul of the believer that is not disturbed by external circumstances. Paul was calm, while all around was stormy. The accusations of the Jews from Asia; the confusion of the mob; the infliction of bodily injury; his apprehension by the Roman authorities and his examination by Lysias wrung from him no complaint; revealed no fear; produced no despondency; affected not his manliness. The following words were St. Theresa's book-mark:

"Let nothing disturb thee!
Let nothing affright thee!
All passeth away:
God only shall stay.
Patience wins all.
Who hath God needeth nothing,
For God is his all."

2. Christian ministers and Sabbath School workers are frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted in their work and conduct. The fact is that the Church itself is an enigma to the world. "The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." (John 3:1). The Jews supposed that Paul was a disturber of the peace; but he really wished to harmonize the Jewish and Gentile elements in the church. They thought he was an enemy of their nation, law and temple; but they were mistaken. He, therefore, suffered greatly at their hands. Every true Christian is, at heart, a martyr. Ignorance led to the crucifixion of Jesus. Acts 3:17. These things, however, do not destroy happiness or tarnish character.

"Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt;
Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled,
Yea, even that wretched mischief meant most harm
Shall in the happy trial prove most glory."

3. "Talebearers and tale-hearers are alike guilty. Whether is more damnable, to be a teller or receiver of tales and of evil reports, it is hard to say; for as the tale-bearer hath the devil in his tongue, so the tale-hearer hath the devil in his ear." (Prov. 6:19, Eph. 4:31). Bernard, quoted by Peloubet.

4. Paul was a man of great mind and culture. He could speak Greek and Hebrew. It has been said that he was the only learned Christian of his time. Christianity is the friend of education.

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